DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 132 PS 019 710

AUTHOR Jones, Linda T.
TITLE Strategies for Involving Parents in Their Children's Education. Fastback 315.
INSTITUTION Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, Ind.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87367-315-8
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 48p.
AVAILABLE FROM Phi Delta Kappa, Eighth Street and Union Avenue, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789 ($0.90; Phi Delta Kappa members, $0.75).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Cooperation; Guidelines; *Parent Participation; *Parents as Teachers; *Parent School Relationship; Preschool Education; *Workshops

ABSTRACT

This publication presents an overview of programs and practices that schools can use for involving parents in the education of their children at home and in school. The first chapter describes programs that demonstrate the ways in which parents can be involved in the education of their children of 1 to 5 years of age. A list of 10 approaches for involving parents in their children's early education is included. The second chapter discusses the topics of: (1) improving communication between home and school; (2) helping parents work with their children at home; (3) involving parents in school activities; (4) developing collaborative planning among parents, students, and teachers; and (5) empowering parents to become decisionmakers in their children's schools. The third chapter provides brief descriptions of parent workshops and activities that schools might want to offer or sponsor. Some are for parents only; others are for parents and children. The fourth chapter describes types of school-parent collaboration that can improve children's behavior, attitudes, and study habits. The concluding chapter offers guidelines for planning a successful parent involvement program. Contains 37 references. (RH)

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Strategies for Involving Parents in Their Children's Education

Linda T. Jones

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She has been a presenter at state and national conferences and at international conferences in Ireland, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Her publications include articles on organizational culture, teacher recognition, mini-grants, literacy, thinking skills, and children's literature. She has conducted numerous workshops for administrators and teachers on parent involvement and has written a guide for principals on developing successful parent-involvement programs.

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Strategies for Involving Parents in Their Children's Education

by
Linda T. Jones

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 91-60204
ISBN 0-87367-315-8
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Bloomington, Indiana

This fastback is sponsored by the University of Colorado Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, which made a generous contribution toward publication costs.

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Introduction

Research strongly supports parent involvement in schools. When parents are meaningfully involved in their children's education, children achieve at a higher level and have more positive attitudes toward school. While all children benefit, children from low-income and minority families have the most to gain when schools involve parents.

Understanding and respecting the diversity of families is essential when developing programs to strengthen the bond between the school and families. Meaningful parent involvement is achieved only when the school creates an environment that makes parents feel welcome, reaches out to parents in new ways and connects them to needed resources, and provides numerous opportunities for participation.

What makes a parent-involvement program successful is educators and parents working together in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the benefit of children. The close home-school relationship can be one of the most positive and enduring influences in the lives of children. Involving parents early – and continuing that involvement throughout the school-age years – in the education of their children at home and at school is one of the most challenging tasks educators face; but it holds the greatest potential for significantly increasing children's social, affective, and academic growth and achievement.

This fastback presents an overview of programs and practices that schools can use for involving parents in the education of their children at home and in school.

Starting Early

Parents educate their children from the moment of birth. The East Otero School District in La Junta, Colorado, acknowledges that a child's first and best teachers are parents who support and encourage learning from the start. To begin the lifelong process of learning, this school district presents to each new mother in the community a learning packet containing a "Learner's Permit" signed by the superintendent of schools, booklets containing ideas for stimulating learning, brochures on reading, and a book of nursery rhymes for reading aloud.

La Junta is one of a growing number of school districts whose interest in contacting parents early stems from the recognition that the early years are critical in providing the foundation for success in school and in life. Efforts to strengthen the home learning environment and to promote parent education are increasingly viewed as a way to reduce the rate of failure among children placed at risk as a result of poverty, language barriers, and lack of support. By acknowledging the learning environment of the home and developing strategies to build and extend family strengths, educators can begin to make a difference in children's learning.

Programs being developed across the country for parents of infants and preschoolers include information and classes on child development, how parents can encourage growth and learning, understanding and dealing with children's behavior, and community health and social agencies providing support to families. Services to families

are provided in a variety of ways: home visits, parent-support groups, classes and workshops, developmental child care, community aides, and referral networks to help parents locate and use special services.

In 1984 Missouri became the first state in the nation to require that all school districts provide parent-education and support services to families. A number of other states and local school districts have launched similar efforts modeled on the Missouri program. Based on Burton White's (1988) research at Harvard on the powerful influence of the first three years of life on learning, Missouri legislators authorized a Parents as Teachers (PAT) program in all school districts (Cohen 1990). This program provides the following services to families:

1. Information and guidance for expectant parents.
2. Parent education, including four home visits and four group meetings over an eight-month period for families with children from birth to age three. Districts must offer five contacts with three home visits to qualify for state funds. The state also provides funds for parent education for families with three- and four-year-olds, requiring a minimum of two contacts.
3. Annual screening for children from ages one to four to monitor language, motor, and physical development as well as hearing, sight, and general health.

PAT parent educators need not be certified teachers but must have experience working with families and have completed a training program. They serve as role models and coach parents in specific ways to foster growth and learning. They show parents how to observe their child's growth in the areas of language, cognitive, social-emotional, and motor development. They also assist parents in linking with health, social, or other special services the family may need. The program helps parents prepare their children for the transition to the school environment and helps the school in understanding the child and the home environment.

PAT is intended to serve all families. Thus poorer parents do not feel that they are being singled out. The program builds on family strengths and emphasizes parent empowerment. The program emphasizes language development and includes activities based on research in emergent literacy, such as reading aloud to children, having a variety of printed and writing materials in the home, and stimulating the child's interest in reading and writing. In particular, storybook reading is emphasized, since it has been shown to have such a strong effect on family interaction as well as on children's literacy.

Since 1965 Head Start has provided a model for involving parents and for supplementing instruction with social and health services. Head Start's Exploring Parenting program starts with the premise that parents are the first educators of their children and is designed to develop parenting skills and to bring parents into partnership with the sponsoring school or agency.

Recent research indicates that Head Start programs increase children's readiness for school, aid their social adjustment, and have long-term effects on their motivation to learn. However, researchers also found that when children entered school, the frequency of communication between parents and schools diminished. Regular contact between Head Start and schools would ease the transition to school as well as assist with curriculum planning and parent involvement. Senator Edward Kennedy has proposed that Head Start's comprehensive service model and parent-involvement component be extended into the early elementary school years for low-income children ages five to eight.

Even Start is a new federal education program that emphasizes teaching parents and children simultaneously. In 1989 approximately $14 million was spent on 76 demonstration project grants. Current plans call for expanding the program. At the same time that children, ages one to seven, are prepared for regular schooling, parents are taught parenting and literacy skills as well as instruction relevant to adult needs, such as applying for a job or improving skills in English as a second language.

Family or "intergenerational" literacy programs are springing up across the country. These programs seek to improve the literacy environment of the home by increasing the literacy skills of the adults and children at the same time. While no single model of a family literacy program exists, they all share the belief that it is important for the parent or primary caregiver to place a high value on literacy and take an active role in the child's education. Another principle is that the more literate the parent or caregiver becomes, the more effective she or he will be in encouraging the child's development. Some programs specifically target parents without a high school diploma, while others focus on at-risk, poor, and minority children and their parents.

Studies in emergent literacy, early childhood education, and cognitive development all indicate the importance of parents in children's literacy development. As children's first teachers, they create the home environment, model positive attitudes toward education, and share literacy activities. But parents who have not attained adequate skills themselves may be unaware of the importance of reading to children or how to create a supportive home environment. While many parents want to help their children succeed in school, they may not have enough money to buy books or other educational materials; and reading and talking about books or ideas may not be a family habit. It is these parents who are most likely to benefit from family literacy programs.

The goal of family literacy programs is to enhance the lives of both parent and child by improving skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors linked to reading. These programs try to break the cycle of low literacy by focusing on the adult and child as partners in learning. Family literacy stresses reading as a social activity to be enjoyed. It sets a pattern for talking together about things and ideas and provides meaningful topics for parent-child conversation. Sharing books in families helps pave the way for school success. Parents who participate in family literacy programs develop self-esteem and gain confidence in their ability to help their children in school.

Family literacy programs currently operate in day-care centers, libraries, adult education centers, community colleges, and public schools. As public schools extend their services to include preschool and before- and after-school care, these sites also could become family literacy centers.

The Kenan Family Literacy Project, which operates primarily in public elementary school sites in Kentucky and North Carolina, is another model of parental involvement designed to improve parents' basic skills as well as their children's learning skills. Launched in 1987 by Shirley Darling with support from the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust, the program is serving as a model for other programs being developed throughout the country.

Three days a week, parents and their three- or four-year-old children are picked up by a school bus and brought to the family literacy site. From 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., with breaks for a free breakfast and lunch, parents and children participate in a variety of learning activities. A typical schedule might have parents in basic skills and employment preparation classes while their children attend the preschool program from 8:30 to 11:00. From 11:00 until lunch time, parents join their children for parent-as-teacher learning activities, which are supervised by an early childhood specialist. Parents and children eat lunch together, after which the children return to their preschool activities with the parents working as school volunteers. This is followed by parents participating in large-group discussions centered on parenting skills until 2:30.

The program includes early childhood education based on the High/Scope Preschool Curriculum and an individualized adult education curriculum that might include basic literacy skills or working toward a GED high school equivalency diploma, and a parenting education component focusing on nurturing, child development, discipline, self-esteem, and pre-employment and job readiness skills. The Kenan model instills in adults positive attitudes about education, which they in turn pass on to their children.

Because of the program's success, the Kenan Trust has allocated an additional $1 million to set up a National Center for Family Literacy (One Riverfront Plaza, Suite 608, Louisville, KY 40202). The center has begun to train staff from throughout the world in the principles of family literacy. It also has published *Family Literacy Model Program Guidebook* and a directory, *Funding Sources for Literacy Programs*.

First Teachers is a family literacy handbook published by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. It provides brief descriptions of 10 family literacy programs, including the Kenan Family Literacy Project. Supported by both public and private funds, these programs are diverse in both their approaches and the settings in which they have been implemented. For example, Kentucky's PACE (Parent and Child Education Program) provides parent literacy training, preparation for the GED, parent participation in their children's preschool classes, and involvement in emergent literacy activities. Children attend an on-site preschool program. In contrast, the Arkansas Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is home-based. Twice a month a paraprofessional, who must be a mother or father from the same community, visits the parent and works with him or her on weekly lessons. On alternating weeks the parents gather for group meetings.

These programs demonstrate how parents can be involved in the education of their children from birth to age five, the period of greatest physical and intellectual development in a child's life. While it may not be possible to launch a comprehensive program such as Missouri's PAT program, a number of other small-scale projects can provide a good beginning. Following is a compilation of approaches for starting early to involve parents in their children's education:

1. Make contact with new parents and provide them with information and sources of support. A personalized yet inexpensive activity is providing a gift basket or packet of materials to new mothers. The packet might include a message from the school conveying interest

in the child's education, information on infants and ways to encourage their development, a directory of community resources, a book of nursery rhymes, and other developmentally appropriate materials.

2. Sponsor workshops for parents of infants and preschool children, providing child care and transportation if needed.

3. Offer parenting courses and classes on child development.

4. Provide a corner in the public library or school library for parent education materials and books for preschool children.

5. When planning elementary school parent-involvement programs and activities, also incorporate activities and information that address the needs of parents of preschool children.

6. Establish a family resource room in elementary schools that provides materials, games, and books for check-out for preschool as well as school-age children.

7. Make regular home visits to families with preschool children. Use volunteers, other parents, or parent-contact aides who know the community to serve as home visitors.

8. Employ and train parent educators who can provide a wide range of services to families and involve parents in the education of their children.

9. Design and implement a family literacy program using the Kenan Family Literacy Project model or one of the other models. Or develop a program tailored to your own community using elements of successful programs.

10. Implement a comprehensive infant and preschool program based on the Missouri Parents as Teachers model, or participate in the training they offer and adapt the program to local conditions.

Chapter 2 and other federal, state, and local funds may be used to initiate parent-involvement programs. A small start may pave the way for a larger initiative. Edward F. Zigler, Sterling Professor of Psychology at Yale University and director of the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, notes that, "There is an absolute grow-

ing recognition that if we want to optimize the development of children, we have to get in there even before they are born with prenatal care – and then do everything we can to see that the environment and learning experience of the child is optimal for the period from 0 to 5" (Cohen 1990).

Involving Parents of School-Age Children

Efforts to involve parents in their children's education must continue throughout the elementary and secondary years. Research indicates, however, that teachers' work with families and parents' involvement with their children's education fall off sharply as children grow older. Despite such findings, there are many ways in which educators can reach out to parents.

Educators are becoming increasingly aware that in schools that value parent participation, there is higher achievement, more positive attitudes, and more effective programs. Research conducted by Joyce Epstein (1984) of Johns Hopkins University also indicates that teachers who involve parents are rated by parents as having higher overall teaching ability. Parent involvement is one of the key components identified in effective schools research, and federal and state programs often require it as a condition of funding.

Ways of working with parents include improving the communication between home and school; helping parents work with their children at home; involving parents in school activities; developing collaborative planning among parents, students, and teachers; and empowering parents to become decision makers in their children's school. The following sections treat these topics in greater depth.

School-Home Communication

Frequent and two-way open communication with parents is the foundation for building parent-teacher relationships and for involving par-

ents as partners in their children's education. (See Fastback 230 *Improving Home-School Communication* by Edward E. Gotts and Richard F. Purnell.)

What is good communication with parents? The reported preferences of parents are not necessarily what school personnel think they are, according to a study by Jane Lindle (1989). School personnel tend to believe that a professional, businesslike manner will win the respect and support of parents. But when parents were asked about their contacts with the school, their responses reveal that they are uncomfortable with a formal professional-client relationship. Instead, they prefer the "personal touch." Personal attention and timely information on an informal basis is more likely to win their respect. Parents want to be included in the dialogue about their child's education and to share their perceptions about their children with school staff They do not want a professional-client relationship; they want to be equal partners in the education of their children.

Achieving the "personal touch" means treating parents as friends. It means showing empathy, warmth, respect, and sincerity. Above all, it means listening carefully to what parents have to say about their children and about their perceptions of the school program. Parents first want to know as much as possible about their children's programs at school. General information they usually want to know about the school program includes:

- What are the goals of the school and the teacher(s)?
- What is the child learning, and how is it taught?
- What are the school's and teacher's expectations?
- What are the attendance and homework policies?
- How is the child doing in school?
- What courses and extracurricular activities are available to choose from, and what guidance is provided to help students make choices?
- What changes are being planned in the areas of curriculum, grading, discipline, homework, or extracurricular activities, and why?

Parents also need specific information concerning school events, activities, and meetings. And probably most of all, parents want to know how they can help their child at home. Because communication is a two-way process, schools must be receptive and responsive to parents' questions and expectations for their children. Parents need to feel that they can express their concerns to the school and that they need to share information that may be affecting their child's school performance. For their part, teachers want parents to realize that they are committed to helping children learn but that they cannot do it alone. They want parents to recognize that their children's education is a shared responsibility between the school and the home.

Communication between the school and the home may be in writing, by telephone, or face-to-face. Written communications should be clear, brief, respectful, and free from education jargon. Telephone communications should be friendly, tactful, and courteous. Face-to-face communication is the most effective and should be used as often as possible. Some of the best opportunities for honest, open, two-way communication take place in informal face-to-face contacts between staff and parents.

Communication early in the school year conveys to parents that their cooperation is important. Personal contact is essential for building a cooperative relationship. Ways to initiate school-home communication during the first week of school are having teachers phone parents to introduce themselves, sending personal notes home and encouraging parents to communicate back, and making home visits. Some teachers like to write a letter to each child and his or her parents during the summer before school begins, a practice sure to be a hit with parents.

School staff also must communicate to parents that they are welcome and wanted in the school. This begins with a welcome sign at the entrance to the school, an inviting reception area, and an orientation program for new parents. Throughout the school year there should be frequent opportunities for teacher-parent and principal-parent in-

teraction. Parents should feel that the school belongs to them, too. Examples of school-home communication practices include:

- Welcome packets for new families delivered to the home
- Class and individual letters and messages sent home
- Back-to-school nights and open houses
- Parent/student handbooks
- School and program information brochures
- Parent-interest surveys
- "Happygrams" reporting good news
- Principal-parent coffees
- Newsletters (class, program, school)
- Teacher-parent breakfasts, lunches, teas
- Special occasion cards/recognition messages
- Student work sent home weekly accompanied by a parent response sheet
- Personal handwritten notes
- Progress/success reports
- Letters and notes from principal, superintendent
- Neighborhood coffee klatches
- Home visits
- Home contact aides (bilingual if needed)
- Monthly event and activity calendars
- Community meetings/presentations

Special attention also should be paid to new families registering children during the year. They need information that will help them and their children adjust quickly to a new environment and school. (See Fastback 304 *Meeting the Needs of Transient Students* by Donovan R. Walling.)

Learning at Home

Creating a proper learning environment at home has a powerful impact on student achievement and behavior at school. Research com-

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piled in *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning* (U.S. Department of Education 1986) concludes that "the curriculum of the home" is twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status. Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with the school do better. And parental influence is no less important at the high school level.

Attitudes and behaviors essential to learning over which parents have control and influence, regardless of their income and education, are listed in the box on page 21. These basic tips can be put in a one-page brochure or printed in large type and laminated for each parent to keep in a prominent place at home. They are ideal as a handout at Back-to-School Night, or for teachers to give to parents when they make a home visit or have a parent conference. *Note to readers: the boxed text in this fastback is intended for parent handouts, brochures, or newsletters. They may be reproduced without permission from the publisher but should include a credit line.*

Ideas to Help Parents Enhance Learning at Home

Principals and teachers can provide parents with many ideas and materials to support learning at home. Following are some suggestions that have been used successfully in many communities.

Tips for Parents. Parent brochures or items in school newsletters can be used to deal with topics of general interest or with specific topics, such as reading, math, science, social studies, study skills, homework, motivation, self-esteem, creativity, and others. In a school newsletter, parent involvement is possible through an idea exchange column. Parents can be invited to contribute ideas or suggestions that have worked for them and are worth sharing with other parents. Tips for parents can be sent home in the form of an attractive one-page brochure or poster, which can be posted on the refrigerator door or on a family bulletin board.

Several professional organizations publish a variety of brochures, pamphlets, and other types of materials for parents, which can be

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Essential Tips for Learning

1. Talk with your child about daily events and take time to listen to what your child wants to tell you. Conversation around the dinner table about everyday and world events promotes learning.
2. Read aloud to your child often – every day if possible – and encourage your child to read to you. The best way to help children become better readers is to begin to read to them when they are infants. The more children read, both in school and outside, the more they will improve their reading abilities. And take your child to the library to get his or her own library card.
3. Encourage children to draw and scribble stories at home. This will help them learn to write with greater confidence in school.
4. Take your child to new and different places, such as museums, historical sites, and nature centers. Talk about what you have seen.
5. Supervise television viewing. Choose good programs and set some time limits – and talk with your children about the programs they do watch.
6. Be generous in showing affection and express interest in your child's everyday activities and accomplishments.
7. Establish a regular time and place for doing homework, encourage your child's efforts, and offer praise when assignments are completed.
8. Encourage good health practices by making sure your child has three nutritious meals a day, gets plenty of exercise and sleep, and has regular medical and dental check-ups.
9. Instill self-confidence by encouraging your child to believe in his or her self-worth and abilities.
10. Monitor how your child spends his or her time outside of school. Limit video games and television viewing and encourage reading, hobbies, scouts, and other worthwhile activities that provide learning opportunities.
11. Make sure your child attends school regularly, show an interest in what is being learned at school, and communicate that education is important. Belief in the value of hard work, personal responsibility, and the importance of education all contribute to greater success in school.
12. Be a role model for your child. Children imitate what they see their parents doing. If you read, your child will want to read.

purchased at nominal cost. For example, the International Reading Association member newspaper, *Reading Today*, carries in each issue short news items related to literacy for parents, which schools are free to reproduce in their own newsletters. The Parent Institute publishes a parent newsletter titled *Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children*. While commercially produced materials tend to look more professional, materials produced by the school can be more personalized and can be designed to allow for parent feedback. Parents appreciate receiving these materials not only for the information and guidance they provide but also as tangible evidence that the school cares about their children's learning and encourages parents to be involved in their learning.

Following is a selective list of organizations that publish materials for parents.

American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209-1888. Phone: (703) 528-0700.

International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, Newark, DE 19714-0000. Phone: (302) 731-1600.

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1906 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1502. Phone: (702) 528-5840.

National PTA, 700 North Rush Street, Chicago, IL 60611-2571. Phone: (312) 787-0977.

National School Public Relations Association, Suite 201, 1501 Lee Hwy., Arlington, VA 22209-1109. Phone: (702) 528-5840.

The Parent Institute, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Phone: (703) 569-9842.

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc., P.O. Box 23444, Washington, DC 20026. Phone: (202) 287-3220.

The boxes on the following pages are examples of parent education materials that schools can send home or publish in a newsletter.

Home Learning Activities. The school can help to promote many kinds of learning activities that parents and children can share in the

Helping Children Develop Self-Esteem

Helping your children develop self-esteem is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. Self-esteem means appreciating one's own worth; it means being accountable for oneself and acting responsibly toward others. Children with high self-esteem take pride in their accomplishments, make good decisions, demonstrate responsibility, and have high self-expectations. Here are some ways to help develop self-esteem in your children:

1. Seek out opportunities to praise and encourage your child.
2. Recognize your child for a job well done.
3. Treat your child with love, respect, and courtesy.
4. Nurture a positive attitude in all tasks.
5. Give your child many opportunities to assume responsibility.
6. Encourage participation in activities in which your child can succeed.
7. Listen attentively to your child's ideas, concerns, and feelings.
8. Reward good behavior and accomplishments.
9. Let children make their own decisions whenever possible.
10. Spend time together and share favorite activities.

home. Suggested activities can be included in the school newsletter or a teacher's weekly letter to parents. Some examples are an annotated list of educational games and toys with recommended ages, announcements of upcoming events of interest to children, lists of places to go, and holiday and vacation activities. Teachers might assemble a set of puzzles and word games in envelopes and send them home for parents and children to enjoy together.

A growing practice in many schools is the use of weekly or monthly calendars with suggested activities that parents and children can do together. Some schools print calendars on the reverse side of the school lunch menus. Calendar activities can range from practice on basic skills to creative projects related to different curriculum areas.

How Parents Can Encourage Creativity

Children's creativity develops in a stimulating home environment and rich family life. A rich family life includes shared meals, lively discussions, time to work and play together, exposure to cultural activities, family trips; and shared family interests such as singing, playing musical instruments, storytelling, camping, bicycling, etc. In addition to a rich family life, children need opportunities to develop their creative talents. Here are some ways to help your children develop their special talents:

1. Provide reading materials that develop imagination, such as fairy tales, folk tales, classic and current children's literature, and open-ended stories.
2. Prize your children's individuality by taking note of their unique contributions.
3. Encourage your children to develop and pursue their own interests.
4. Praise your children's efforts and accomplishments.
5. Provide an environment that encourages exploration and risk-taking.
6. Allow time for thinking, reflection, and even daydreaming.
7. Provide resource books, materials, and challenging games in the home.
8. Provide art and building materials to work with.
9. Refrain from criticizing or evaluating your children's creative efforts.
10. Schedule a variety of experiences, such as visits to unusual places; enroll your children in courses and workshops on topics of special interest to them.

A word of caution is in order about use of the calendar format: When calendars provide specific activities to be completed every day, it may cause parents to feel guilty about not being able to do all of them. To counteract this, it should be stated clearly that the activities are suggestions from which parents and children can choose depending on interest and available time.

Motivating Your Children to Succeed in School

Children are subject to many influences outside their home, but parents have the most lasting influence when it comes to success in school. Motivation is the key to becoming a successful learner. Here are some ways you can help to motivate your children.

1. Show interest in your children's learning. Inquire about what they are learning in school; ask to see their papers and projects.
2. Work with your children in setting specific daily goals that are achievable. Write out the goals and post them in a prominent place and have the children check off each goal when completed.
3. Help your children envision and formulate long-term goals.
4. Instill in your children the attitude that achievements are usually the result of persistence and hard work, not luck or ability.
5. Show caring and love if your children make mistakes or fail, and help them see mistakes as opportunities to grow.
6. Demonstrate through your words and actions faith in your children's ability to learn and achieve.
7. Look for successes in your children's efforts and acknowledge them.
8. Recognize, praise, and celebrate your children's successful completion of a challenging goal.
9. Model for your children language that conveys positive expectations, such as I can, I will, I want to, I understand, my goal is, etc.
10. Stress frequently to your children the importance of learning and education.

Voluntary Home Reading. Research clearly indicates that the amount of reading students do outside of school is significantly related to reading achievement. (See fastback 225 *Promoting Voluntary Reading in School and Home* by Lesley Mandel Morrow.) The school can play a vital role in involving parents in activities and programs that promote home reading. Following are descriptions of some programs schools might consider to encourage home reading.

"Books and Beyond" is a home reading program designed to increase students' recreational reading and decrease indiscriminate TV viewing. It can be organized on a schoolwide or classroom basis. Students participate in a Read-a-Thon, a reading incentive program with different themes for each year to ensure high interest level. Themes include Quest for Knowledge, Book Bucks, Jog America, Around the World, and Olympic Decathlon. Activities include reading books at home (and at school), keeping records of those books, charting individual progress on a central bulletin board, and self-monitoring of TV viewing. The program encompasses student populations from first to ninth grade. Manuals provide information and materials needed to implement the program. Additional student rewards such as pencils and buttons can be purchased separately. For more information contact: Solana Beach School District, 309 North Rios Avenue, Solana Beach, CA 92075.

"Magic Moments: Sharing Reading Aloud" is a schoolwide or classroom program to promote reading aloud in the home for one month (October). It is sponsored by the Colorado Council of the International Reading Association (CCIRA). A sample packet sent to all principals and CCIRA members the last week in August contains a letter to parents, a student time sheet and award certificate, bookmarks for parents and children, brochures for parents, a theme poster, and literature activity booklets for teachers. For ordering information contact: CCIRA Read-Aloud, 4617 S. Joplin Way, Aurora, CO 80015.

"Parents as Partners in Reading" is a commercially available family literacy program developed by Patricia A. Edwards for training parents to read with their children. It consists of facilitator manuals, short videotapes, and children's books. The program may be used with non-English-speaking and non-reading parents as well as with parents of children from preschool to fourth grade. For further information and costs contact: Children's Press, 5440 N. Cumberland, Chicago, IL 60656.

Over the summer many children get out of the habit of regular reading and, as a result, may regress in their reading skills. Schools can

help parents by sending home a brochure on the importance of summer reading, annotated lists of interesting and age-appropriate books, and some suggested activities they can do with books. Some schools offer an incentive for reading over the summer by holding an ice cream social or pizza party when school opens in the fall for students who have been regular readers. Also, schools can provide parents information about summer public library programs and story hours for children.

Another activity to involve parents in their children's home reading is the "bookbag" or "backpack" project. This is especially appropriate for homes where there is little reading material. The basic bookbag contains a book and a stuffed animal book character. It also might contain audiotapes, a response journal (each student who takes the bag home creates a page for the journal), and other activities for the parent and child to do together. The stuffed animal has a special appeal to young children. They can hug it and talk to it as they read the story or have the story read to them.

Kaaren Gray, a second-grade teacher in Frederick, Colorado, has expanded the bookbag idea into a larger backpack package. Each backpack is developed around a theme (dinosaurs, space, cats, sea life, "creepy crawlies", safari, etc.) and includes primarily nonfiction books, other learning materials, and a stuffed animal related to the theme. Many of the books are the Young Explorer and World Explorer titles published by the National Geographic Society. Learning materials included are instructional games, videotapes, puzzles, science experiment materials, and hands-on materials such as sea shells. Included in each backpack is a laminated inventory list and a note explaining that the materials are for family enjoyment and discussion. Backpacks have been so popular with children and parents that there is a waiting list for each pack.

While the initial expense for bookbags and the more costly backpacks is considerable, they have great appeal and many children take them home during the year. They also provide high-interest materi-

als for home learning and family interaction. Often the PTA is willing to take on bookbags as a project. Other funding is available from mini-grants and Chapter 1 or Chapter 2 funds.

Helping with Homework. Homework has traditionally been the major form of interface between parents, their children, and the school. Teachers give homework to reinforce and extend school learning, and parents are expected to provide the environment and support to help their children complete homework assignments successfully. For their part, teachers need to develop assignments that are meaningful and interesting and to avoid boring drills and worksheets that make homework drudgery for children and parents alike.

Parents need information about general homework policies and about what is expected of them. In some schools it is the practice at the beginning of the school year for teachers to provide parents with a "Homework Information and Expectations" handout. The handout can have a tear-off sheet for the student and parent to sign and return indicating they have have read and discussed it. The handout might include the following information:

1. The purposes for giving homework, for example, extending classroom learning, getting students to read and think more deeply about a topic, learning to work independently, developing regular study habits, etc.
2. The days of week to expect homework and the approximate amount of time it should take to complete assignments. Some assignments will need to be completed the next day; others, such as a report or a project, may not be due for several weeks.
3. How homework is checked and evaluated, whether it is considered in the student's grade.
4. Responsibilities for making up missed homework assignments.
5. What is appropriate for parents to do to help their students with homework.

A homework tip sheet for parents (see box) can be distributed as a handout, or included in a school newsletter.

Homework Tips for Parents

1. Set aside a family quiet time daily when each family member is engaged in quiet activities while the children do their homework. Starting quiet time when children are young establishes the expectation for doing homework and gets them into the routine of studying.
2. Establish a time and place where homework is to be done. Make sure the table or desk is well lighted and that needed materials, such as paper, pencils, pens, and crayons, are readily available.
3. Make sure your children understand the assignment. If needed, work through the first question or problem with them. If children do not understand the assignment and you are unable to help them, have them call a friend or the teacher for help. Some communities have a Homework Hotline staffed by volunteers who can help.
4. For elementary-age children, check over the completed assignment and sign and date it.
5. Each day ask whether there is any homework. Even when there isn't any, the simple act of asking conveys that you consider homework to be an important responsibility.
6. Don't forget to praise your child for homework efforts.

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Workshops and Support Groups for Parents

Parent workshops and support groups provide opportunities for education, guidance, and sharing. Parents gain better understanding of child development, greater self-confidence in parenting skills, more enjoyment from their own children, and in many cases, motivation to continue their own education. Parent-education programs also produce positive results for children. Parent education has long been a part of preschool programs. It is time that it be extended throughout the school-age years.

Parent workshops should be informal in order to foster a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Parents should feel comfortable about asking questions and discussing their concerns. The workshop leader should provide for continuous interaction and feedback using such group techniques as brainstorming, role playing, and working in pairs or small groups. Parents do not want to be preached to. They often have good ideas – ones the workshop leader might not be aware of – for promoting learning and positive behaviors in children.

Following are brief descriptions of parent workshops or activities that schools might want to offer or sponsor. Some are the home-grown variety; others are commercial programs requiring an outside consultant or trainer. Some are for parents only; other are for parents and children.

1. "Make It-Take It" Workshops. These are designed for parents to construct home learning materials. Parents may be asked to bring

special materials, or the school can provide ready-to-assemble materials.

2. Family Learning Center. The school is open two or more evenings per week with learning activities provided for all ages. When feasible, access to the computer lab and library is available to both adults and students.

3. "Learning Fairs." Single-session workshops are held in the evening at a high school on a variety of topics, such as study skills, memory techniques, concentration, etc. Students, parents, and teachers are invited to attend.

4. Parent-Support Groups. These are organized and run by parents with meetings held in homes or at school.

5. Family Room. This is a room at school containing educational books, toys, and games to loan to parents. Parents are welcome to drop in and participate in informal activities. Parents share with each other and learn ways of helping their children.

6. Child and Adolescent Development Series. These programs provide parents with a better understanding of their children's physical, social, and intellectual development. Series on the middle school child are especially popular.

7. Special Topic Workshops. These focus on helping children learn and succeed in school. Popular topics include reading, math, study skills, self-esteem, motivation, alternatives to television, and creating a learning environment in the home.

Workshops for parents on emergent literacy are particularly popular in preschool programs and in schools with whole-language programs at the primary level. Several recent books, written specifically for parents, dealing with these topics are: *Home: Where Reading and Writing Begin* by Mary Hill (Heinemann, 1989), *Literacy Begins at Birth* by Marjorie Fields (Fisher, 1989), *Learning to Read* by Margaret Meek (Heinemann, 1989), *Reading Begins at Home* by Dorothy Butler and Marie Clay (Heinemann, 1987), and *Writing Begins at Home* by Marie Clay (Heinemann, 1988).

Another popular program is the family math workshop. One of the best known is the Family Math Program. The program consists of six to eight sessions of an hour or two each. It is designed for parents and children (K-8) and provides activities to develop problem-solving skills and to build an understanding of mathematics using hands-on materials. *Family Math*, the program's resource book, provides parents with clear instructions for conducting a variety of math activities at home. While parents can use the activities without attending the workshop, the program's developers strongly recommend that parents and their children attend the workshop in order to benefit from the group interaction and discussions about mathematics. For further information contact: The Family Math Program, Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

Another type of workshop deals with various aspects of parenting, such as understanding children's behavior, developing responsibility, communicating with children, and discipline. The value of these programs is not so much in giving advice to parents about child-rearing as it is in providing a forum where parents can share ideas, find mutual support, and encourage each other. Following are brief descriptions of three such programs:

Systematic Training for Active Parenting (S.T.E.P.) was developed by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay. It also is available in Spanish. The program runs 18 hours and is usually scheduled for weekly sessions of a half-hour to two hours each. Topics covered include providing encouragement, developing mutual respect, disciplining in ways that are consistent with behavior, setting firm limits, exploring choices, and making decisions jointly. S.T.E.P. helps parents learn how to reinforce their children's positive behavior (and not reinforce unacceptable behaviors) and how to encourage cooperative behavior. Parents learn that they are not necessarily to blame for their children's difficulties; and when feelings of guilt are removed, they are able to function more effectively. For further information contact: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, American Guidance Ser-

vice, Publishers' Building, P.O. Box 190, Circle Pines, MN 55014-1796.

Parent Effectiveness is the updated version of the original Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) developed by Thomas Gordon. The program runs 24 hours with three-hour sessions over a period of eight weeks. The program is designed to give parents insights and skills for developing responsibility in children and for fostering more satisfying family relationships. Topics include how to listen and talk to children, changing unacceptable behavior by changing the environment, and dealing with conflicts. For further information contact: Effectiveness Training Inc., 531 Stevens Avenue, Solana Beach, CA 92075.

Active Parenting, a newer program developed by Michael Popkin, is a video-based program partially based on S.T.E.P. The program consists of 40 videotaped vignettes for use in two-hour sessions over six to eight weeks. The program is designed to enable parents to learn a broad range of parenting skills and to support them in raising cooperative and responsible children. For further information contact: Active Parenting, 4669 Roswell Road, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30342.

What works in one school may not work in another. For example, family rooms have been more successful in schools that have preschool programs. Parenting workshops are well attended in some schools but not in others. Each school needs to examine and assess a variety of ways of assisting parents to take an active role in the education of their children.

Parent-School Collaboration

Parent involvement is a key component identified in effective schools research. (See fastback 276 *Effective Schools Research: Practice and Promise* by Arthur W. Steller.) When parents are actively involved in the life of the school and classroom, they learn about the educational program firsthand and become advocates of the school in the community. When parents assist teachers in volunteer activities that make good use of their skills and time, mutual appreciation and satisfaction flourish. When parents are involved at school, children see that they value education and that school is an important place to be. Some of the ways parents can be involved in school activities are:

1. Parent visitation days, with invitations designed and written by the children, provide a way to acquaint parents with the school's program and services.
2. Assisting teachers with special classroom activities and projects, such as bookmaking, science experiments, cooking, field trips, etc.
3. Using parents' special talents and expertise to enrich the curriculum.
4. Reading to children and listening to children read.
5. Tutoring children who need extra help.
6. Assisting with band, chorus, drama, and other programs in the arts.

7. Helping supervise and direct before- and after-school programs for children.
8. Assisting with the organization and supervision of grade-level or schoolwide projects, such as a read-a-thon, book fair, meet-the-author program, book swap, reading carnival, and ice cream social/awards night.

When involving parents in school activities, keep in mind the following:

1. Survey parents to find times that are the most convenient for them. Some will be available during the school day, some after school, some in the evening, and some only on weekends. By varying the meeting time, more parents can be involved.

2. Serving light refreshments and providing child care and transportation if needed will convey to parents that they are really wanted. Written reminders or phone calls made the day prior to each meeting help to ensure good attendance.

3. Involve parents in planning activities that meet their needs and those of their children. Activities that involve the whole family get larger turnouts. Children can design invitations, demonstrate activities, put on puppet shows, and make refreshments. Ideally, the activities should provide opportunities for learning and for something to take home to extend learning.

In addition to involving parents in school activities, there are other types of school-parent collaboration that can help improve children's behavior, attitudes, and study habits.

One of these is the Parent-Student-Teacher Pledge or contract outlining a set of conditions that parents agree to carry out, which is signed by the parent, teacher, and child. (See box on next page.) A similar type of pledge or contract can be used for students, which is then endorsed by the parent and acknowledged by the teacher.

Outreach programs involving teachers or a community liaison aide are another form of parent-school collaboration. In some districts the staff identifies a small number of students and their families for in-

Parent-Student-Teacher Pledge

School Name:

School Mission:

Because I believe that children learn best when there is close collaboration between the home and the school, I am committed to helping my child progress and achieve in school.

As a parent I pledge to:

- Make sure my child attends school regularly and on time.
- Provide a home environment that encourages my child to learn.
- Insist that all homework assignments are done.
- Communicate regularly with my child's teachers.
- Support the school in developing positive behavior.
- Talk with my child about his or her school activities every day.
- Encourage my child to read at home and to monitor his or her TV viewing.

I make this pledge to both my child and to those who are trying to help my child succeed in school.

Parent's Signature _____ Date _____

Student's Endorsement _____ Date _____

Teacher's Acknowledgement _____ Date _____

depth collaborative planning, for example, with students with learning or behavioral difficulties, excessive absences, illness, or other circumstances. Special scheduling, released time, or additional compensation may be needed if teachers are to undertake this additional responsibility.

Some schools have found it beneficial to employ a parent/community liaison to work with parents, make home visits, and plan parent activities. The liaison should be sensitive to the needs of parents, and in some communities must be bilingual. Collaboration also may ex-

tend beyond the school and the home to include community family-service agencies.

Home visits are an ideal way to establish rapport and communication between school and home and to provide teachers with many insights that are not likely to surface in the traditional parent-teacher conference. Teachers who make home visits report that the time invested pays for itself many times over during the year.

If possible, home visits should be scheduled soon after the opening of school in the fall. Appointments can be arranged through a telephone call or letter accompanied by a return form indicating the parent's choice of time for the visit. Visits should be brief; a half-hour to 45 minutes is a reasonable amount of time.

Home visits can serve many purposes: becoming acquainted with the child's home environment and gaining information about the child from the parent's perspective, emphasizing the importance of the parent's role in the child's education, updating the parent on the child's progress in school, providing an overview of what happens on a typical day in the child's classroom, providing ideas on how the parent can help at home, sharing or demonstrating a specific home learning activity, contacting parents who could not attend parent-teacher conferences, or soliciting parent assistance to help solve a specific problem. However, each home visit should have a specific purpose.

Teachers or other staff making home visits should be particularly sensitive to the family culture. They should listen attentively and respond to the parent's questions. They should encourage parents to talk about their child and inquire how the child spends his or her time at home. Other questions will depend on the purpose of the visit. Above all, it is important to be friendly and supportive. After the visit, a follow-up phone call or note thanking the parents for their hospitality and reviewing any decisions that were made conveys to parents that the school cares and wants to help.

Administrators can encourage home visits by setting an example and making home visits themselves, by providing time for teachers

to make home visits by employing substitutes or dismissing school early, or by hiring community aides to make home visits.

One of the most comprehensive parent-school collaborative efforts is the School Development Program, often referred to as the "Comer Process" after its founder, Dr. James Comer, professor of child psychiatry at Yale University. This program, which began in an inner-city elementary school serving minority students in New Haven, Connecticut, has since spread throughout the country. In 1990 the Rockefeller Foundation funded a $15 million grant to replicate Comer's model nationwide.

Comer maintains that current reform measures directed at improving academic achievement will not work with minority children or children outside the mainstream, because they fail to address child development and relationship issues. His program uses a system of cooperative governance involving parents and the community in the life of the school and focuses initially on developing children's social skills and self-discipline.

Cooperative governance is carried out through a school planning and management team composed of the principal, selected teachers, parents, a support-staff member (counselor, social worker), and representatives of other programs in the school. The team develops a comprehensive plan that addresses school climate, improved academic performance, and staff development.

Involving parents as equal partners in cooperative governance helps to overcome the sense of alienation many minority parents have toward the middle-class orientation of the school. Parents also are actively involved in the life of the school. Some serve as classroom or library assistants. In addition, the school offers workshops for parents on such topics such as reading, math, discipline, homework, and computer activities. Some schools offer courses to help parents pass the GED test for their high school equivalency diploma. The school also invites parents into the school's social life by holding potlucks, picnics, read-aloud nights, and games for parents and staff.

Comer Process schools stress social skills. For example, children learn how to write invitations and thank-you notes, how to serve as hosts, etc. The curriculum integrates academic and social skills with an appreciation of the arts. There also is an emphasis on discipline as self-control. Specific rules, such as "Come to class on time," are stated in positive terms and posted on classroom bulletin boards. The Comer Process appears to be a promising model of parent involvement that results in success in school for many poor and minority children.

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Planning a Successful Parent-Involvement Program

Developing a successful parent-involvement program requires wholehearted commitment. According to Anne Henderson, the main barrier to parent involvement is not parent apathy but lack of support from educators. Parents will not become involved unless the principal and staff show through their actions that they want them involved.

According to researcher Joyce Epstein (1986), 85% of parents, regardless of socioeconomic background, spend time helping their children at home when asked to do so by the teacher. Parents said they would spend more time with their children's education at home given guidance from teachers about what to do. Some parents, a smaller percentage, will become involved in activities at school that involve their own child's classroom or the whole school. A very small percentage of parents may express an interest in serving in a decision-making role on the school advisory committee. This is understandable, since advisory committees usually require a considerable time commitment that may not be possible for some parents. Therefore, it is important to find ways of involving parents in a variety of roles and to offer a diversity of activities to meet the different needs and interests of parents.

One example of meeting the differing needs and interests of parents is at a school in East Los Angeles, where the principal created a sewing room with borrowed and donated sewing machines (Gandara 1989). The school invited parents to come and help make outfits

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for the band and curtains for the classrooms. The parents also were allowed to use the sewing machines to make clothes for their own children. Parents – mostly non-English-speaking – flocked in. They contributed to the school, which made them feel valued. But they did more than that. They created a community within the school and developed a social network of their own. One positive outcome attributed to the close home-school relationship was a dramatic improvement in students' reading scores. Gandara goes on to make a compelling case for turning schools into community centers that are open for evening and year-round use for all ages. Thus the school becomes a place where family needs are met and from which the community draws strength and identity.

A school staff committed to developing a parent-involvement program, or improving an existing program, can begin by creating a committee of teachers, support staff, parents, and older students. This committee would have the task of assessing the current status of home-school relationships and parent-involvement activities. The committee might want to conduct parent surveys and interviews to determine parents' needs and interests. Also, the committee members should investigate parent-involvement programs in other schools and review the literature (including this fastback) for ideas and activities that have been successful and might be adopted or adapted for use in their school and community.

Whatever activities the committee decides to implement, there are strategies that appear time and again in successful parent-involvement programs. This fastback concludes with a list of additional strategies gathered by Anthony Fredericks, Timothy Rasinski, Jack Blendinger, and the author, which schools should consider using when developing a program that will reach all parents, including those who are hard to reach

1. Provide parents with a constant flow of interesting and timely information about upcoming events and activities. Send

reminder notices and make telephone calls to parents who may need additional encouragement.

2. Make parent involvement a schoolwide effort. Teachers and administrators must be committed to parent involvement. Staff enthusiasm stimulates greater parent participation.
3. Maintain a warm and friendly school environment and, above all, make it a place where parents feel comfortable, needed, and respected.
4. Involve students in recruiting parents. Students can make personal invitations, plan activities, and serve as hosts. Student interest generates parent interest.
5. Whenever possible, develop activities and projects that involve the entire family.
6. Make your outreach efforts contagious by involving as many parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community members as possible.
7. In planning activities, provide parents with a number of scheduling options: mornings, afternoons, after school, evenings, and weekends. Activities should be scheduled for the convenience of parents, not schools. Many schools now adjust staff schedules in order to provide for parent contacts and activities.
8. Make daily efforts to communicate with parents through a brief phone call or note – especially parents who do not participate regularly.
9. Provide parents with many opportunities to discuss their children's interests and achievements. And acknowledge those achievements. Parents like to see their children succeed.
10. Do not plan activities that are a repetition of school activities but rather that extend the natural relationship between parents and children and that provide opportunities for family interaction in ways that are educationally interesting and meaningful.

11. Use the telephone frequently for brief messages of good news. This will help parents get used to the idea that a call from school is not just to convey bad news about a problem.
12. Find out why parents who are not involved choose to distance themselves. Approach them with a nonjudgmental attitude to discover reasons for noninvolvement. Sometimes parents just need information and encouragement.
13. Consider home visits, especially for parents who, for whatever reason, do not come to school.
14. Consider holding parent meetings in locations other than the school. Hold neighborhood coffees in homes, churches, or community centers for parents who may be intimidated by the school environment.
15. Create a parental-support system to make parents feel they are part of a larger family. Enlist parents in a telephone tree to spread the word about special school activities and projects.
16. Coordinate with local community organizations and agencies that offer services to families. Schools can link families in need of social services to agencies about which families might not be aware.
17. Demonstrate to parents that the school cares about issues affecting their welfare by becoming involved in such neighborhood projects as day care, health, and recreation.
18. Whenever special events and activities are planned for parents, provide child care and transportation if needed.
19. Be patient with parents. Some may be reluctant to get involved due to any number of reasons. Keep trying and do not give up on any parent.
20. Make sure parents are recognized for their efforts. Everyone likes to receive some form of recognition: happygrams, certificates, awards, thank-you letters, end-of-year celebrations.

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